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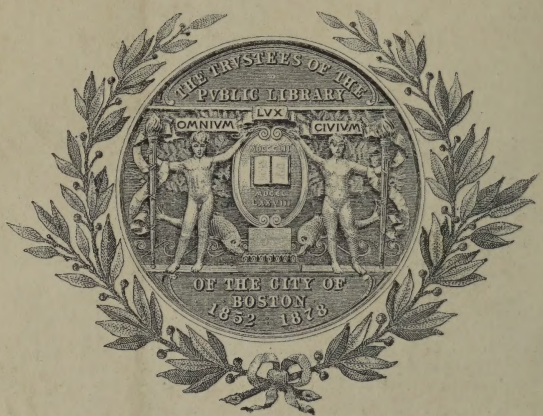
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NARRATIVE

OF

THE LIFE

OF

THOMAS COOPER.

FOURTH EDITION.

NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY ISAAC T. HOPPER,
1837.

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The master mounted on his horse driving John before him. pp. 7 8.

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PREFACE.

Many of the circumstances related in the following narrative, came under the immediate notice of the writer; the others he had from a source which he believes authentic; and however romantic many of them may appear, he fully believes them to be correct. He was well acquainted with Thomas Cooper, and his family, and can testify to his sobriety and general good character, while he resided in Philadelphia and its neighbourhood. Thomas was a man of more than ordinary talents, and, considering his very limited opportunities, they appear to have been well cultivated.

THE AUTHOR.

NARRATIVE, &c.

THOMAS COOPER, the subject of the following narrative, was of African descent, and was born a slave in the state of Maryland, where he continued to reside until he was about twenty-five years old. During his servitude, he experienced many hardships, being scantily clothed and fed, and compelled to labour very hard, and was obliged to lodge in a little hut, which was so open, that it did not shelter him from the cold in winter; but although his body was held in cruel bondage, his mind was free, and he frequently put up his prayers in secret, to his merciful Creator, for deliverance from his sufferings; believing that all

are the work of one Almighty hand, who hath placed them in various situations, and that he was disposed to extend equally his care and protection to all.

About the year 1800, Notly, (for this was his name while a slave,) left his master's service, and went to Philadelphia, and hired with M—— & E——, who kept a lumber yard, in which he was employed; here he conducted with fidelity and industry, and soon gained the confidence and esteem of his employers.

After some time he married a respectable woman of his own colour; they lived together several years in much harmony and affection, and were esteemed, by their neighbours and acquaintances, as orderly and industrious people, until a person who had gained the confidence of John Smith, (for upon his arrival in Philadelphia, he had assumed this name,) betrayed him, by informing his master where he was to be

found. This man soon after came to Philadelphia, and had poor John arrested and carried before one of the Aldermen of that city, and upon proof that he was a slave, an order was granted to convey him back to Maryland.

His employers were humane men, and greatly commiserating his condition, and sympathizing with his wife and children, offered to pay a large sum of money for his freedom, that he might be restored to them; but no entreaties would avail with his cruel master, he was deaf to the voice of pity, and poor John was handcuffed, and a rope fastened to each arm across his back, to which another was tied, one end of which, the master held in his hand; and mounting his horse, rode off, driving John before him. All this took place in the presence of his wife and children, who witnessed the horrid transaction with the utmost distress.

While they were fastening the fetters upon

John he was engaged in talking to his wife. He counselled her to take care of their children, whom, he said, he wished to remember their father; expressing a hope that by industry and frugality, she would be able to keep them at school, until they were old enough to be put out, when he wished them placed with persons of good character and industrious habits; and he cautioned her against indulging them in idleness, saying, that he wished her to remember his advice, as it was not likely that they would ever meet again.

He then addressed his children, saying, "you will now have no father to take care of you; be good children, obey your mother, and be sure that you never do any thing to grieve her; don't play in the street, or with naughty children—be industrious and faithful in whatever you are set about."

He continued his speech until his master raised his whip, when he set out on his journey--his wife and children wept bitterly;

and, although he manifested great sensibility, he retained his composure.

John and his wife, by industry and frugality, had acquired a little property: they lived in their own house, and had been, for several years, enjoying as much comfort as their hearts could desire; but in an instant, as it were, all their hopes seemed blasted, and they parted in the deepest anguish and despair not expecting ever to see each other's faces again.

The writer of this was present at the examination before the Alderman, he saw John fettered and torn from the bosom of his wife and children.

The circumstances of the case were well calculated to awaken feelings of sympathy and tenderness; and at this distant period, his sensibility is excited at the recollection of the distressing scene; it made impressions which time cannot remove, as long as memory lasts.

John's wife was now left with four small children to provide for, and he was conveyed, in the manner above described, to the city of Washington, and there offered for sale to persons who bought slaves on speculation, to be transported to Georgia, or some other southern market. But even in Washington, where slavery is tolerated by the laws, there were those who could not, with indifference, behold inhumanity like that which this poor slave was doomed to endure, and they rebuked his master for his cruelty. This was very unexpected to John, and inspired him with a determination to make an effort to regain his liberty; for his feelings were acute, and his affections warm, although his skin was black.

Manacle'das he was, he made out to trip up his master's heels, and he fell to the ground. John then ran to the woods: but in a few hours, he was pursued by his avaricious master, with a company he had collected to

assist him, and it was not long before he was discovered concealed in the bushes. As soon as he found that he was seen by his pursuers, he ran into a swamp, where he was hunted like a fox, until the darkness of the night released him from the chase.

He then made the best of his way to the house of a man of his own colour, whose sympathy was excited on seeing an innocent fellow-being bound with irons and cords, like the worst of criminals. This man was an old acquaintance, and knowing John's integrity, soon found means to rid him of his fetters, and he once more felt himself at liberty. His friend and benefactor hastened to set before him the best his table afforded, and after taking a hearty meal, for he had eaten but little since he left Philadelphia, he again set out for that city; but the journey appeared very hazardous, as he had several rivers to cross, and expected persons would

be stationed at the bridges to arrest him; he, however, determined to make the attempt.

He knew it would not be safe to be seen, and therefore hid himself in the bushes during the day, and pursued his journey in the night. After suffering much with hunger and fatigue, he arrived safely in Philadelphia, and went immediately to see his distressed family; it was a joyful meeting: but John well knew that he would be again pursued, and could not be safe to remain long under his own roof; accordingly he left his family, and went to the house of a respectable citizen, well known as the black man's friend, and whom we shall call Philo Christian; here he was kindly entertained.

The yellow fever was then in the city, and the family had removed into the country, except a coloured woman, who remained in the house to attend upon Philo, whose engagements required that he should be

mostly in the city during the day, and not unfrequently during the night also.

John was placed in an upper room, the door of which was kept fastened. He had been in this place but a very little time, before his master with two constables, came in pursuit of him; and Philo being absent, they proceeded to search the house; and, on coming to the door of the room where John was, and finding it fast, they demanded entrance.

In a little time Philo came home, and being informed by the coloured woman what was taking place, he immediately went up stairs, and found the intruders consulting how they should gain admittance. Philo instantly ordered them out of his house, upon which one of the officers replied, "this gentleman's slave is in your house, and if you do not immediately deliver him up, we will get a warrant from the Mayor to search it." He again requested them to leave his house, and

added, "the Mayor dare not grant a search-warrant for my house." They then withdrew, and in a few minutes the officer returned, with a message from the Mayor, requesting to see him. Philo promptly waited upon the Mayor, who lived near by, when the following dialogue took place.

Philo.—Hast thou business with me?

Mayor.—Yes, this gentleman, (alluding to John's master, who was present,) says, his slave is in your house; is it so?

Philo.—I think thou hast just informed me, that this man says he *is;* dost thou not believe him?

Mayor.—Well, but I wish to be informed by you, whether he is in your house or not.

Philo.—I think the Mayor, upon a little reflection, will see, that he has no authority to ask me this question, and of course, I am not bound to answer it; if he is in my house, and this man can make it appear, I am liable to a very heavy penalty, and no man is

bound to inform against himself; and the conduct of these people has not been so civil, that I feel myself under any obligations of courtesy to satisfy them. Hast thou further business with me?

Mayor.—Did you say that I dare not grant a warrant to search your house?

Philo.—Indeed I did, and now repeat it, neither thou nor any other magistrate in this city; without intending any disrespect to those in authority, I am a man of reputation, I am not a suspicious character.

Mayor.—(Smiling) I don't know that, I am inclined to think in the present case you are.

Philo.—Hast thou any thing further to say to me?

Mayor.—I believe not.

Philo.—Farewell.

The avarice of his master, together with his desire for revenge, induced him to pursue every stratagem that he could devise to recapture poor John; and among others, the

following was resorted to :—one of the party procured a suit of clothes, such as are worn by Friends—a hat with a round crown and broad brim, and a plain coat. Thus attired, he made his way to John's house; upon entering, he saw his wife, bathed in tears, sitting in their once peaceful and happy cottage, with her children round her, the youngest by her side, looking its mother in the face, and, by its gestures, seeming to inquire the cause of her grief.

But all this had no effect to soften the heart of this man, whose object was lucre, as a reward for apprehending the unhappy fugitive. With affected sympathy and kindness, he inquired where John was to be found, saying, that his master was in pursuit of him, and he wished to see him, in order to assist him, in getting out of the way: but this artifice, although ingenious, and must have been attended with some expense and trouble, proved unsuccessful; for the woman

The constable searching for John. p. 18.

was on her guard, and declined giving him any information, but referred him to her friend Philo Christian, as the most suitable person to advise with in the case. He became greatly enraged at this disappointment, and gave vent to his anger in profane wicked language; declaring, as he withdrew, that he would have John, if he was to be found upon the face of the earth.

John remained under the protection of his friend about a week; during most of this time, persons were seen lurking about the premises watching for him, but at length they disappeared. Supposing they had concealed themselves, a person was procured, who, some little time after dark in the evening, suddenly ran out of the house, where John was; but he had proceeded but a short distance, before the apprehensions, which were entertained, that the enemy was in ambush, were realized, for they suddenly

rushed from their hiding places, and seized upon the man that was running.

Finding that they were mistaken in the person, they released him ; but John's friend made application to the Mayor, had them arrested, and compelled them to enter into bonds for their good behaviour. The next evening, the same person went out as before, and was not interrupted ; the following evening John left his hiding-place, and got safely into New Jersey.

Here he hired with a farmer, and, although he was within about eight miles of his home, he was an exile from it ; he remained in this situation several months, during which time, by his good conduct, he gained the confidence and esteem of the family where he resided. It was their practice on first day afternoons, to collect together and read portions of the scriptures, and other religious books, and John was permitted to sit with

them ; which he esteemed a great privilege, and often expressed his gratitude for the favour ; he was also permitted to take his meals at the same table with the family. Instead of being elated by this familiarity, it made him more humble.

After it became known that John had returned to Philadelphia, the person who had betrayed him, became greatly alarmed ; and his fears so wrought upon his imagination, that he frequently dreamed that he saw John in his house, with a knife in one hand, and a torch in the other, and that he was about to kill him and burn his house ; and he would sometimes cry out in his sleep, and start up in his bed ; so true is the saying, that, "wickedness condemned by her own witness is very timorous, and being pressed with conscience always forecasteth grievous things." But he had no cause to fear, John had no desire to revenge the wrong that had been done him, for he had learned,

that it was not right to render evil for evil, but contrariwise, blessing.

His affliction was great at being obliged to live separated from his wife and children, for whose welfare he felt a deep interest: at length he ventured to rent a small house, in a retired situation, not far distant from the village of Haddonfield. He now hoped to be permitted to enjoy the comforts of domestic life unmolested, and yet, he was in constant fear of the man-stealers; this often interrupted his slumbers in the night, and even when at his work, he would startle at the rustling of the leaves; so that he passed his days in fear, and his nights were constantly seasons of terror.

After some months, the place of his retreat was again discovered, and his master came to Philadelphia, with the intention to proceed to New Jersey to arrest him. John's friend Philo heard of this circumstance, and immediately apprised him of his danger. He had

already suffered much, and now finding himself again pursued, was driven almost to despair, and determined to resist by violence. The morning after receiving the information, that his master had discovered his place of residence, and was coming to arrest him, he rose early, loaded his gun, and, with a determined resolution, prepared to defend himself.

It was not long before he beheld his master, with two other persons, advancing along a lane towards his house; he placed himself in his door, and, upon their near approach, he called out, "don't cross that fence, for the first man that does, I will shoot him." So unexpected a salutation, coming from a man with a gun in his hand, struck them with terror, and they soon turned back to procure assistance.

In the meantime John went to Philadelphia, which was within about five or six miles of his home, and informed his friend Philo of what had transpired; his friend

reasoned with him on the great impropriety and inconsistency, with the christian character, of putting the life of a human being in jeopardy. John seemed to be convinced of the correctness of the views of his friend, and therefore resolved again to fly for safety; and, with the advice of Philo, concluded to remove his family to Boston, in hopes of finding an asylum there, where he might live in peace.

A vessel was then lying in the river Delaware, which was expected to sail for that place in a few days; and the merchant who had charge of her, pitying his distress, offered him a passage free of expense, which he gratefully accepted; and, although he had never been at sea before, he made himself useful, and fully compensated the captain for his passage, by his labour.

His friends freely gave him certificates of his good character which he found very useful in procuring employment among

strangers, and in a few days after he arrived in Boston, he hired with a lumber merchant of that place. Now finding himself in circumstances to provide for his family, his employer, at his request, wrote to Philadelphia, desiring them to come to him; his wife accordingly disposed of their property in that city, and took the money she received for it, with her children, to Boston, where she again met her husband.

About the time of his leaving New Jersey, he changed his name from John Smith, to that of Thomas Cooper, and by this name he was always afterwards known.

He often noticed and greatly lamented, the bad conduct of the people of his own colour, as well as that of those of a different complexion. And, with a view of making himself more useful, he joined in religious communion with the Methodists, and in a short time became a popular preacher among them and visited some of the West India Islands, as a minister.

After his return from the West Indies, he made a similar visit to Nova Scotia. In these places it is said, he was very useful, not only by his exhortations, but by his pious example; his religion being that of the heart, and not of the head only, his preaching had much effect on his hearers.

Not long after his return from those visits, he concluded to go to Africa, the birth place of his fathers, and, for this purpose took shipping with his family, and safely arrived in London, the metropolis of Great Britain. He was received with much kindness by a number of philanthropists, who were made acquainted with him, and the object of his visit, and his children were placed at school, at the expense of a Friend in London, well known as a benevolent man, and a friend of the afflicted. Thomas Cooper soon became a man of much note, and preached to large congregations in that city. While there, he made a selection of hymns, which

were published in a large duodecimo volume, and his friends had his likeness placed in the book, as a frontispiece.

After remaining about year and a half in London, a passage was procured for him and his family, to Africa, as appears by a note in the hands of the publisher, of which the following is a copy, viz :—

"J—— A—— informs his friend Thomas Cooper, that he has this day paid for the passage of T. C. and family to Sierra Leone, per the Echo, Captain Row. The vessel is not expected to sail till the third week in this month.

34, Gracechurch-street.

10*mo.* 3*d*, 1818."

THOMAS COOPER,

Borough.

Thomas Cooper remained in London rather more than a month after the date of the above note.

When about to take his departure from London, for Sierra Leone, he had a meeting, at which, it is said, there were several thousand persons. On this occasion the following advertisement was published in hand bills, viz :—

THE

REV. T. COOPER,

THE AFRICAN,

WILL PREACH HIS

FAREWELL SERMON,

TO HIS FRIENDS IN THIS QUARTER,

ON

TUESDAY NEXT,

NOVEMBER 3d, 1818,

At half past 6 o'clock in the Evening,

AT THE MEETING IN

BROWN'S LANE,

SPITALFIELDS,

PREVIOUS TO HIS DEPARTURE ON

HIS MISSION TO AFRICA.

Bertrand, Printer, 22, Green-street, Bethnal Green

Thomas Cooper delivering his farewell sermon to his friends in London. p. 30.

Soon after this meeting, Thomas, with his wife and children, sailed for Africa, and arrived at Sierra Leone, after enduring many hardships on the passage, in consequence of tempestuous weather. They were cordially received by the inhabitants, his fame having reached there before him.

How different now were his feelings, from what they were, when in his own country. There, in continual dread of being torn from his family and friends, and of being reduced to the most degrading and abject slavery; now, enjoying, without fear of molestation, the sweets of liberty, in the bosom of his family, and among his friends, who rejoiced in having such an acquisition to their colony. He immediately entered upon the object of his mission, and had meetings among the people—all classes flocking to hear him.

But this happy state was of but short duration, for Thomas had not been more than two or three years in Africa, before he

was taken ill with the fever, which has so often proved fatal to strangers in that hot climate, and fell a victim to it. His wife and children, by this afflicting event, were again left destitute, and that too, in a land of strangers; but with the consoling reflection, that it was a dispensation of Providence, which had bereaved them of a husband, a father, a protector, and a friend; and although the separation was painful, yet the survivors had comfort in the reflection, that he was now gone to a state of happiness, where the voice of the oppressor is heard no more.

Perhaps few men have ever lived, who experienced greater changes in their condition in life, than the person whose history we have been writing; we have seen him a poor menial, suffering for the want of food and raiment, exposed to cold, and writhing under the lash of the tyrannical slave driver; again, we see him a minister of religion,

pleading with the people to forsake the evil of their ways, and showing in his life, and by his own example, how far superior a life of virtue and integrity is, to that of vice and crime. The consequences of the latter, are always disgrace and misery; while the sure reward of the former, is the favour and applause of the wise and good, and in the end, quietness and assurance forever.

After the death of Thomas Cooper, his wife and children returned to London, and from there to Philadelphia.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning Providence,
He hides a smiling face.

"His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r."

THE END.